



Aalborg Universitet

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community

An outline

Koch, Ulla

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
[10.5278/freia.14142416](https://doi.org/10.5278/freia.14142416)

Publication date:
1993

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Koch, U. (1993). *A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community: An outline*. Institut for Historie, Internationale Studier og Samfundsforhold, Aalborg Universitet. FREIA's tekstserie No. 8
<https://doi.org/10.5278/freia.14142416>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Ulla Koch

A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community

- an outline

FREIA

*Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg
Department of Development and Planning
Aalborg University
Fibigerstraede 2
DK-9220 Aalborg Ö.
Phone: +45 98 158522 Fax.: +45 98 153298*

Paper
October 1993

8

Ulla Koch:

**A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community
- an outline**

Paper from

FREIA, Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg

Department of Development and Planning

Aalborg University

Fibigerstraede 2

DK-9220 Aalborg Ö

Phone: +45 98 158522

Print: Centertrykkeriet, AUC 1993

ISSN: 0907-2179

FREIA's paper series contains preliminary working papers, papers for conferences and seminars, project descriptions, lecture manuscripts, chapters from books etc. The papers are made by researchers connected with FREIA or by researchers who have visited the centre. The paper series aims at spreading out the knowledge of FREIA's activities, internally as well as externally. The papers can be ordered at Aalborg University, Department of Development and Planning, phone: +45 98 158522, ext. 2452.

Ulla Koch

**A Feminist Political Economics
of Integration in the European
Community**

- an outline

**Paper for the Grace seminar
"Women and the Building of Europe"
Brussels 11th October 1993**

Introduction

We are used to thinking of macroeconomics and international economics without associating questions of gender. When we read or listen to analyses of international economic development, the gender aspect is never mentioned. Somehow this seems quite natural because people (of any sex) are barely mentioned at all. The level of aggregation is too high to expose gender relations, and the analytical concepts are of such a character that the living conditions of people can hardly be grasped. Nevertheless, we know intuitively that living conditions are influenced by international economic development. And so are relations between the sexes in different regions and social economic groups of a national economy. Though it is never spoken of, a de facto connection exists between the international economic level and gender relationships. How should we then cope with this connection analytically? I am afraid that at this moment of time it is impossible to give a definite answer to this question from either an economic analytical or a feminist analytical perspective. It is however possible to consider some very substantial and important aspects of the question.

I do not intend to approach the analysis as though it were a question of treating women as a marginal, vulnerable group who need special attention and care through various forms of compensating social and equal opportunity policies. In my opinion, this approach has always been highly patriarchal, actually serving to keep women marginalized and victimized by "hard economic realities".

Instead I want to look at gender balances within economy. I want to discuss how gender balances are affected by various forces in international economic development. We learn from economic textbooks that an unbalanced economy is likely to be an unhealthy economy. If a national economy is considered unhealthy, the authorities are expected to take measures to solve the problems in

order to get the economy into balance. How should gender balances be dealt with?

Dealing with gender in economics

Before discussing gender balances and economic development in detail, I think it would be useful to consider how the gender aspect should be incorporated in general in economic research. The economic discipline has been the latest within the social sciences to develop gender-focused theories and analyses. During recent years much effort has been put into developing the gender aspect of economics. The conference "Out of the Margin - feminist perspectives on economic theory" in Amsterdam last spring presented a convincing array of these efforts.

I see four different basic themes for incorporating the gender aspect in economics:

1. The gender category must be incorporated in economic research on a par with the other social categories used in distributional analyses (for example socioeconomical, ethnic, educational, and locational categories) when it comes to describing gender differences in an economy. The gender category must be incorporated in order to describe the difference in access by women and men to economic resources (income and wealth) and power (rights of property and disposal) as well as the work load of women and men, both in the formal and the informal economy.
2. Economic research must contribute to the explanation of gender inequalities. First of all, these explanations must deal with the question of where the gender inequalities stem from; and

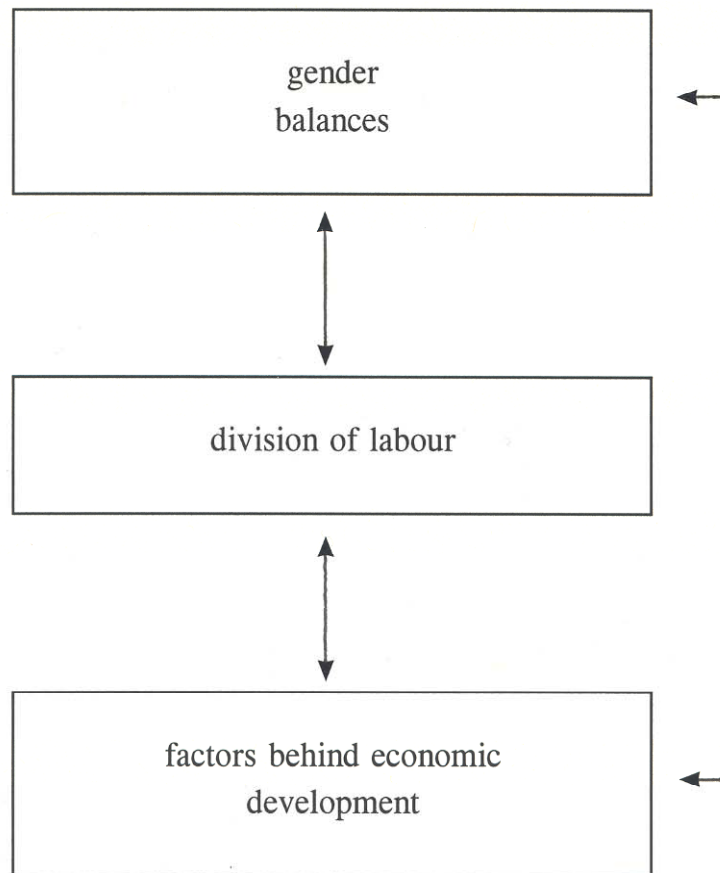
secondly, they have to deal with the question of the ways in which gender inequalities are constantly maintained or regenerated.

3. Economic research must realize that gender inequalities constitute one of the forces behind the development of society, and economists must begin to incorporate this factor in their theories.
4. Economic research must incorporate the abolition of gender disparities as an objective in the development of economic policy. This objective must of course be given a specific and action-oriented formulation for equal rights policy. Furthermore, it is necessary to be aware of the unequal living conditions of the sexes, when estimating the consequences of economic policy. By this, I mean that in the analysis of the expected consequences of planned economic policies, one should always analyze which consequences this policy in all probability will have for various groups of women and various groups of men, and then estimate whether the policy will advance or restrain the equal rights process.

The analytical framework

The above mentioned principles are general guide lines for feminist economic research and theory building. In this paper I intend to concentrate on the question of establishing an analytical relationship between economic integration and gender balances.

An outline for how to construct a feminist political economics of integration in the European community can be modeled this way:



Gender balances

On the level of national economy it is up to the politicians to decide whether an imbalance is considered a problem per se or it is a means to achieving other economic goals. For example, a budget deficit might be used for reducing unemployment and a surplus might be used for controlling inflation.

Likewise, with regard to gender balances an imbalance should not automatically be considered a problem. Some imbalances are, however, decisive and imply explicit suppression of women. Others are not important with regard to equal opportunity for women and might even be considered coincidental. How a balance should be viewed will

change from time to time and vary across countries and regions. The newest feminist research shows that there is not a simple answer to how a imbalance should be deemed.

In order to deal with the idea of gender balances it is necessary to establish an accounting framework. In such an accounting system there are two dimensions to be considered. The first dimension describes how access to economic resources is divided between individuals. The other dimension describes how economic burdens are divided between individuals.

Access to economic resources means:

1. access to education
2. access to independent business financing
3. access to and administration of inheritance and capital
4. access to jobs
5. equal pay for equal jobs
6. promotions and careers in the labourmarket
7. access to income transfers in relation to:
 - unemployment (including part time workers)
 - old age pension
 - disablement and sickness compensation
 - maternity leave
 - being a (low income) single mother

Full access to an economic resource requires economic independence from a spouse. If a woman needs her husband's approval and signature in order to be able to finance establishing her own enterprise, she cannot act in an economically independent way. Neither is she economically independent if her unemployment relief is dependent upon her husband's income.

Division of economic burdens between the sexes relates to:

1. the work load in
 - paid work
 - unpaid work
2. provision for dependent family members
3. payment of taxes and compulsory insurance premiums

In order to analyse the balances within these two dimensions it is necessary to look at two levels: 1. the "visible" level, including laws, labourmarket agreements, official rules and explicit policies of institutions, and 2. the "invisible" level, concerning how things are done in practice.

During recent decades a lot of attention has been given to the visible obstacles to women gaining economic independence. Many changes in the laws and rules of various countries have been made. In spite of this fact, discriminating rules and policies still exist. Such discrimination affects gender balances. Even if rules and policies are non-discriminatory, gender imbalances can occur or be maintained because of discriminatory practices.

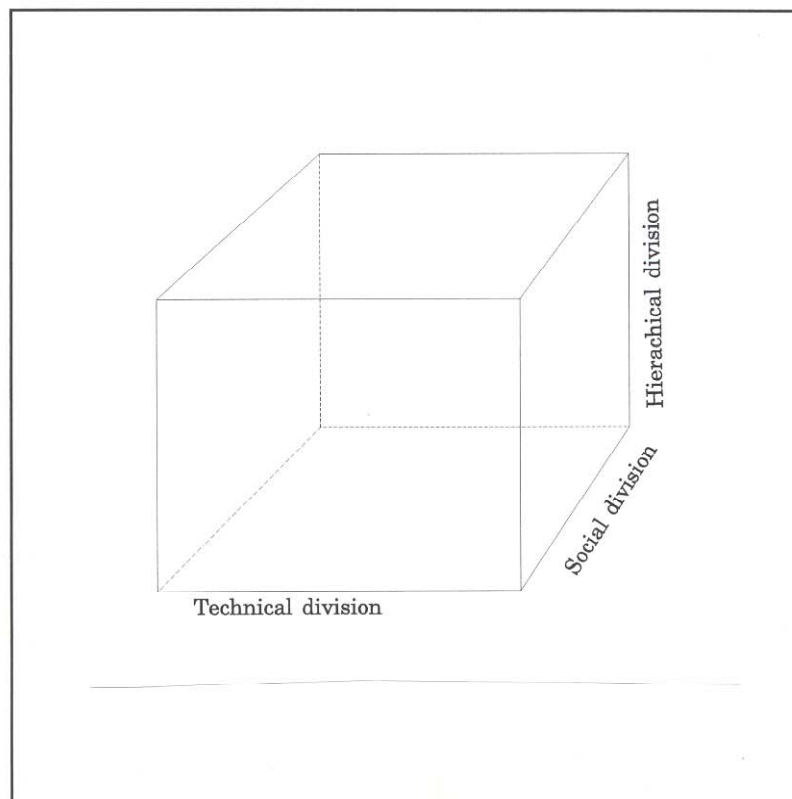
The existence of gender imbalances is due to a combination of effects stemming from both dimensions. A good example is the increasingly feminization of poverty. Much of this problem stems from difficulties in access to economic resources for single mothers, combined with and enforced by a heavy work load of unpaid work and a heavy burden as providers for children. Another part of the feminization of poverty relates to old women who have never had the opportunity to save for a pension.

I will not go deeper into examples of using this analytical framework. I only want to stress how important it is to get more statistical and

other kinds of information concerning the division of economic resources and economic burdens and view them in combination. This should be done using persons - and not households - as entities: If the household is used as an entity the economic dependency of women is blurred. If we look only at how economic resources are distributed the fact that some persons carry heavier economic burdens in relation to their economic resources will not be visible.

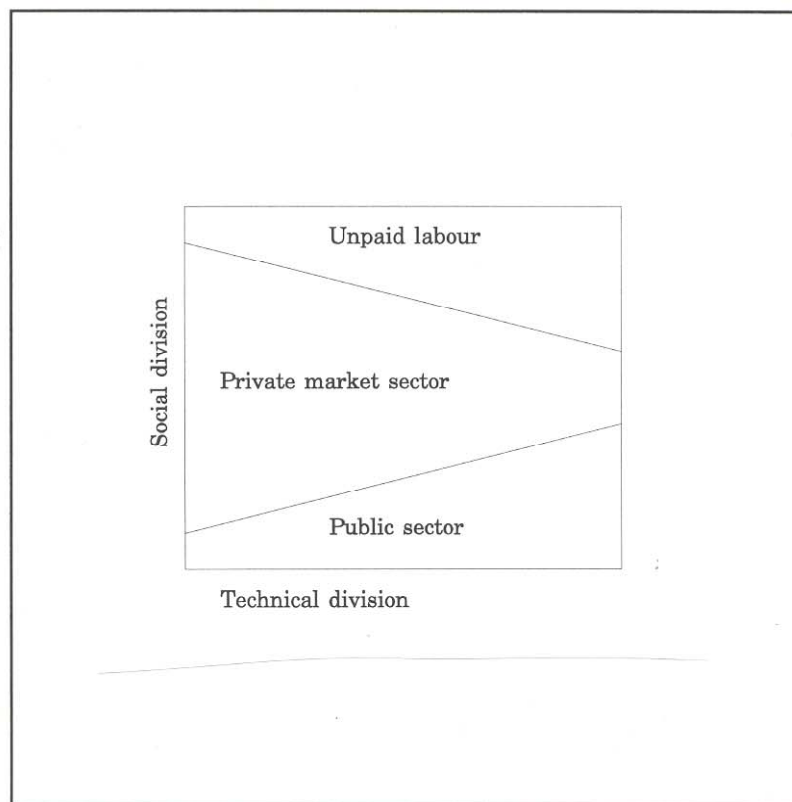
The sexual division of labour

Gender balances are closely related to the division of labour. It is important to stress here that I include unpaid labour in my concept of labour.



The three dimensional division of labour

A way to describe the division of labour is to model it as a three dimensional box. The first horizontal axis represents the social division of labour. The social division of labour describes how productive activities are divided among the production of different products. The other horizontal axis represents the technical division of labour. The technical division of labour describes how the production of every product is divided into specialized sub-tasks. This specialization is closely related to the technology of production. The vertical dimension describes how jobs are organised hierachially.



The sectorial division of labour

If we look at the bottom plane of the box we can illustrate the borderlines between three sectors of the economy. Part of the production takes place in the private market sector. Another part takes place within the public sector, and the last part is placed within the informal, unpaid sector. The borderlines cut across both the social and technical divisions of labour. The borderlines differ from country to country and change along with general economic development.

It is a well established fact that the division of labour is gendered. Just how the division of labour is gendered again differs from country to country, and it changes through time. However as a general rule we find women concentrated at the bottom of job hierarchies, and in the public sector. They also perform most of the unpaid and low paid labour.

Economic development and division of labour

The process of economic development clearly involves a series of changes in the division of labour. The division of labour changes due to many factors: access to natural resources; invention of new technologies, development and acquisition of new skills by workers; access to new markets; development of new forms of property rights and industrial organisations; changes in national and international monetary arrangements; changes in human needs; cultural changes in the perception of how the sexes should interact. Lastly and very importantly the division of labour is influenced by political interventions and regulations.

The division of labour, and thereby the variety of living conditions for different groups of both men and women, is constantly influenced by the above mentioned factors. Some of the factors are governed by blind market forces, some by political decisions, but most of them by

a combination of the two. Thereby gender balances are constantly influenced by these factors through changes in the division of labour.

Economic integration and economic development

International economic integration has been a fundamental feature of global economic development. The establishment of a single European market is only a strengthening of this ongoing process. By eliminating physical, technical and fiscal barriers between the member countries, the Community intends to ensure that persons, goods, services and capital can move freely across its borders. Economic theories of integration try to predict the effects of different degrees of economic integration. It is characteristic for such theories that they are not very precise in their predictions. According to the theories the effects depend largely on different treatments of factual information concerning national economies. These different methods have to be taken into consideration in analysing the effects.

I will mention three major types of effects:

The first is comprised of structural changes within the industries of the member states due to a reorganization of the European international division of labour. Closely related to this are changes in the activity level of different regions. Some regions might experience economic growth while others lose important industries because of increased competition.

A second effect to be considered consists of changes in labour markets due to new possibilities and incentives for some groups of employees to relocate with or for a job--with or without their families. In order to cope with this situation new forms of labourmarket agreements must be developed.

The last type of effect I will mention has to do with government spending. Attempts to harmonise different forms of tax rates and changes in taxbases due to changes in productive activity levels will influence the capability of individual governments to finance public expenditures.

Closing the circle: Economic integration and gender balances

Effects from the integration process are expected to influence men's and women's access to economic resources. The distribution of economic burdens is also likely to be influenced. Unfortunately, there is not space or time here to spell out all the lines that can be drawn from the three types of effects to the two dimensions of gender balance--including those involving changes in the division of labour.

My ambition has been to present an outline for the analysis of the relationships between the forces of integration and gender balances. My hope is that the area will gain increasing attention from social scientist and politicians. I don't believe that gender balances necessarily have to be a passive residual of economic development. Choices can be made. However, this will require research-based knowledge about the status of and developments in gender balances related to economic development.

In FREIA'S paper series the following papers have been published:

1. Karin Widerberg: Udfordringer til Kvinneforskningen i 1990'erne -föredrag på Center for Kvinneforskning i Aalborg 10.5, 1990.
2. Feminist Research. Report 1976 - 1992, August 1992.
3. Ann-Dorte Christensen: Kvinder i den nye fredsbevægelse i Danmark - mellem køkkenruller, resolutioner og teltpæle, 1992.
4. Ulla Koch: Uformel økonomi og social arbejdsdeling - en fortælling om tværfaglighed og det umuliges kunst, 1992.
5. Marianne Rostgaard: Kvindearbejde og kønsarbejdsdeling i tekstilindustrien i Danmark ca. 1830 - 1915, 1992.
6. Inger Agger: Køn og krænkelse - om politisk vold mod kvinder, 1992.
7. Margrethe Holm Andersen: Heks, hore eller heltinde? - et case-studie om tanzanianske kvinders politiske deltagelse og kønsideologier i forandring, 1993.
8. Ulla Koch: A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community - an outline, 1993.

FREIA, the Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg, is an interdisciplinary organization of feminist researchers at Aalborg University whose central point lies within the Social Science Faculty. Research is made within the fields of anthropology, history, sociology/social science, political science, economy and development studies. The present research programme "Gender relations, power and identity in a developmental perspective" forms the framework of a number of individual projects. FREIA is a part of the Department of Development and Planning at Aalborg University.